

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in New York City March 30, 2000

You know what I want to do? I want to tell you this is Michael Sherman's birthday. It's also—George, where are you? Is that your name, George? George Beirne, it's his birthday also, and he came all the way from Alaska to be here. *[Laughter]* So I'm trying to think about what I should do when I leave office, and I think I'll do birthday parties. *[Laughter]* Birthday parties—no, this is good.

John and Margo have been so good to us, and this is going to be such a long, arduous campaign. And Brian Snyder said to me when Ed Rendell was talking about how we just had this wonderful party here, Brian said, "Well, why don't you just stand up and suggest to Margo that she just leave the table settings out"—*[laughter]*—"and we'll be back several more times." *[Laughter]*

Let me say to all of you, I'm grateful for your presence here, but I'm particularly grateful to John and Margo for being so good to me and to the Vice President and to the DNC and also to Hillary. It means a lot to me. And their son, I'm grateful to him, because he keeps me in Pokémon cards—*[laughter]*—which I give to my nephew, which raises my status within our family. Far more important than being President is being able to give your nephew Pokémon cards. So I am profoundly grateful for that as well. *[Laughter]*

Let me say to all of you, this is my speech—see, I made my big speech here. *[Laughter]* I know that many of you have come to a lot of these; others may be at your first one. But I wanted to tell you that I'm working very hard in this election, and not only because I like and admire and am grateful to my Vice President but because I think he understands the future and has the knowledge and experience to lead us there, not only because I want desperately to become a member of the Senate spouses club—*[laughter]*—but because I believe in what we've done in the last 7 years.

I didn't run for President the first time I had a chance to run, because I didn't think I was ready to run. And I had been Governor for quite a long time in 1988, when the election was open, and it looked like we had a good chance to win, and I almost ran. And I realized

that no one should run for President who does not have a very clear idea not only of what the conditions of the country are and the challenges facing it but of what you would do on the day after the Inauguration, across a whole broad range of issues.

All of you, in your own ways, have been quite successful in life, or you wouldn't be here tonight. And one of the things that I always tell people when they ask me about this job is, I say, "Well, I think a lot of folks get in trouble because they forget it is a job." I mean, it's a job like other jobs. And the only difference is, you have to completely define to some extent what it is for you; that is, how you will allocate your time, what you believe the priorities are, and what you intend to do.

So I speak to you tonight as someone who is not on the ballot. For the first time in nearly a quarter century or more, I won't be an active participant in an election as a candidate. Most days, I'm okay with it. *[Laughter]* So I'm here—as much as I'm here as President, I'm here as a citizen of this country who desperately loves America, who is grateful for the good fortune that we enjoy at this moment but who has had the unique perspective, I believe, to know a few things about where we are and where we're going and what's really at stake here.

So I just want to make a couple of points. Point number one is, there are real differences between these two parties. And they're not the differences people used to believe existed. One of the things I promised myself when I got elected is, when I left, nobody would ever be able to say that the Democrats were weak on spending, weak on deficits, weak on taxes, weak on defense, weak on crime, weak on welfare, couldn't be trusted to run the country. Well, you don't hear anybody even talking about that in this election.

But—so what are the real differences? And I would just like to talk to you about them. And I know you understand it, but I think it's worth focusing on. First of all, we have real differences on the budget, what we do with your money. We believe that we can afford a tax cut but that it has to be targeted and limited

so that there is enough money left to keep paying down the debt, to save Social Security and Medicare when the baby boomers retire, and to continue to invest in what works in education, in science and technology, in health care, in the environment, and the other things we have to go forward with together as a people. That's what we believe.

They believe that we should have a tax cut bigger than the one I vetoed last year, one which would—frankly, it speaks well of you that you're here, because all of you would come out better with their deal in the short run. But what would happen is, I mean, I think—give yourself a few points here for being here. You would all come out better with their deal in the short run. But what would happen is, we would go back to the bad old days of deficits, and then they would have to have big cuts in education, in health care, in the environment, science and technology, a lot of which is powering this economic boom we're in. And in addition to that, they would not have the funds to guarantee that when all the baby boomers retire, we wouldn't impose an unconscionable burden on our children and grandchildren, through the cost of medical care, Medicaid, Social Security.

Now, this is a huge thing. And let me say, I think it's important because it's not like we don't have any evidence. We tried it their way for 12 years, and we had high interest rates, high unemployment, low growth. We quadrupled the debt, and we were in a terrible fix.

Now, we have the longest economic expansion in history, 21 million new jobs, a 30-year low in unemployment and welfare, a 20-year low in poverty, a 25-year low in crime. So it's not like there's not evidence here, and yet, that is the issue. That is the issue in the Presidential race. That is the issue in the Senate race in New York. That is the issue. Who is right on the economy and the budget? Are they right, or are we right? To pretend that there are no consequences because things are going well would be the height of folly. It's a huge issue.

Now, there are other issues. We have a different view about America's role in the world. We agree on some things, my administration and the Republican leaders; I'll give them credit for that. They're trying to help me pass the bill that would permit China to become a member of the World Trade Organization. I think

it's important to our national security and real important to our economy.

And one of the things I want all of you to understand, since you may not have been thinking about it is, we have to lower no tariffs; we have to lower no trade barriers. This entire bill involves our letting China into the WTO in a way that they lower tariffs; they lower trade barriers; they let us sell things like automobiles and automobile parts and have distributorships in China, they didn't used to do; and we don't have to agree to transfer our technology or put manufacturing plants up there or anything. It's a one-way street. It's 100 percent in our favor. The only reason they do it is that in turn, they get full membership in the World Trade Organization, which is good for us, because that means if they violate their trade obligations, we have an international body to take it to.

So the Speaker of the House is trying to help me pass a bill that literally could save democracy in Colombia by increasing their capacity to fight the drug traffickers and the guerrillas and reducing their ability to import drugs into this country and helping the farmers to find something besides coca to grow.

But on other areas, we're very different. I think we ought to support the U.N. and get people to share our burdens more than they do. I believe in the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and they don't. That's a big issue in the Senate race here, a big issue in the Presidential race. I think it would be folly for us to walk away from arms control after the United States has led the way, not just in my administration but in previous administrations, Republicans and Democrats.

This is a departure for the Republicans. To walk away from the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and say we'll just always be able to build bigger, more sophisticated bombs, and instead of just a few countries with nuclear weapons, there turn out to be a few dozen, who cares? I care. And I think it's a big issue. And you ought to care. You shouldn't assume that there will never be another nuclear weapon exploded, no matter what, if instead of a few countries with nuclear weapons, you have a few dozen. So there are big issues here.

I think we ought to raise the minimum wage. They don't. I think we ought to pass a Patients' Bill of Rights for the 190 million Americans in a managed care system. And at least so far,

they don't. I believe that we ought to pass commonsense gun safety legislation to protect more kids from violence. And I believe we can do it without, in any way, interfering with the rights of sports people and hunters.

But I got asked in my press conference what I thought about all the mean things Charlton Heston's saying about me. *[Laughter]* And I said I still liked his movies. *[Laughter]* I still liked his movies, and I liked him. You know, he came to the White House a couple of years ago, and I thought he was a delightful man.

I don't care what they say about me. That's part of the cost of doing business and being President, this being attacked by people who disagree with you. This is not about me and the NRA; this is about whether people stay alive or not. This is a big issue—huge issue in the Presidential race.

Their position, the Republican position in Washington is that guns are the only thing in our national life where there should be no prevention; it should all be punishment. Now, if you raised your children on the theory that there should never be any prevention, there should only be punishment, your kids wouldn't turn out so good, even if they had welts across their back from being punished.

Or as I never tire of saying—they always say, "Just enforce the laws on the books. Just punish people when they violate them." Well, we have increased gun law enforcement over what the previous administrations have done. And in my budget, I've asked for a lot more people to help us enforce the gun laws more strongly. And there's something to be said for that. You would be amazed what a small number of gun dealers are responsible for selling guns to such a large number of criminals. So there's something to be said for enforcement.

But one of the reasons that gun crime is at a 30-year low is that the Brady bill has kept a half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers from getting handguns. And they were against that as a party. We only had a handful of Republicans supporting us in Washington. And Governor Bush and the Republican congressional leadership, they've been against closing the gun show loophole, against banning the importation of large-scale ammunition clips, which makes a mockery of our law against assault weapons, because you just bring them in, those clips, and then modify the guns. And this has a lot to do with whether your kids are safe.

And again, it's the difference in the way they think than we think. Suppose I said that I agree with the Republican philosophy we should abandon all prevention and only do punishment. For example, I've been in a lot of airports in my life, and nearly everybody I've ever met is honest in an airport—99.9 percent of the people in airports are perfectly honest. They bear me no ill will. And they're overcrowded anyway, and people are frustrated, and they're often late. And if you walk through one of those metal detectors and you've got a big, heavy money clip or an elaborate belt or something, you're liable to set it off three or four times, and you're angry and frustrated. And I'm just sick of it, and so I just think we ought to take those metal detectors out of the airport. And the next time somebody blows up an airplane, we ought to throw the book at them. *[Laughter]* That's the philosophy.

This is a big deal here. It's a different way of thinking. I do not believe it is necessary to demonize them the way some of us have been demonized in the past and still are. I don't want us to have our counterpart of Richard Viguerie, who represents the hard-core far right and does Mayor Giuliani's fundraising letters—you know, thinks my wife is basically up there with a Communist brigade or something. *[Laughter]*

We don't have to do that. We can talk about the honest differences. But I'm telling you, there are big differences here. And it's not like we don't have any evidence. What they're saying is, "Don't bother me with the evidence. We know where the money is. We know where the votes are. We know where the intensity is. Don't bother me with the evidence." And to be fair, they just disagree. I'm not willing to let another child die for their theory. I think we ought to have a safer country.

And so—and I think it would be a disaster for us to give up the fiscal responsibility that has brought us this far when we can take this country out of debt in a dozen years for the first time since 1835 and guarantee all the young people another generation of prosperity. And I could give you lots of other examples.

But the point I want to make is: There are big differences, and the record is clear. The evidence is in. And I hope you will share that with people. And I just want to make one other point, which I try to say at every turn. In February, we had this big celebration of beating the longest economic expansion in history. Now,

we've got the longest economic expansion in history, and there was not a war in it, which I'm especially proud of.

So when this happened, being kind of obsessive about American history, I asked my Council of Economic Advisers—we were in there talking about it, and I said, “When was the last longest economic expansion in history?” And they said 1961 to 1969, which many of you in this room remember well and participated in.

Now, I want to tell you something about that, why this election is so important. I graduated from high school in 1964 at the high water mark of that economic expansion. President Kennedy had just been killed, and the country was heartbroken, but we united behind President Johnson. He was wildly popular, won an historic victory in 1964. Inflation was low. Unemployment was low. Growth was high. Optimism was rampant about the ability of Congress and the courts to resolve the civil rights challenge of the country in a peaceful manner. Everybody thought we were going to win the cold war as a result of the superiority of our system, and nobody would have believed that Vietnam would tear the heart out of the country—1964. And so, we all just went merrily along our way.

Now, within a year, there was the terrible incident in Selma, Alabama, at Bloody Sunday, which I just celebrated the 35th anniversary of. Within 2 years, there were riots in our cities and the country began to split apart over Vietnam. Four years later, in 1968, I graduated from college, 2 days after Robert Kennedy was killed, 2 months after Martin Luther King was killed, 9 weeks after Lyndon Johnson couldn't run for President anymore because the country was split right down the middle over Vietnam.

Then President Nixon won the election on one of those divisive campaigns. He said he represented the Silent Majority, which, by definition, meant that the rest of us were in the loud minority. And so it was one of those things of “us” versus “them.” And that's something the Republican Party was very good at. They demonized us real well and quite effectively all during the eighties, and they still make a lot of votes making people think that we somehow don't share their values because I'm for things like the hate crimes bill and “Employment Non-Discrimination Act,” and I don't think gay people ought to be bashed if they're good citizens.

But that happened. And then, shortly after that election in early 1969, the longest economic expansion in American history vanished. And we went on to the oil price shocks, the inflation of the seventies, the stagflation of the late eighties, and everything that's happened ever since. What's the point of all this? The point is that I've lived long enough to know nothing lasts forever; nothing can be taken for granted. And I have waited for 35 years for my country to be in a position to build the future of our dreams for our children.

This is a big election. And you cannot let people believe that this is something that they can approach casually, just because times are good. When times are good, you have to look to the next generation. We can take this country out of debt. We can save Social Security and Medicare for the baby boom generation. We can dramatically reform our schools. We can provide opportunities in areas that haven't participated in this recovery. We can lead the world toward greater peace and freedom. But we cannot do it unless we have leadership who understands the future, has the knowledge and experience to take us there, and is committed to it. We dare not risk, by our inaction or our cavalier attitudes, blowing what is, I know, the chance of a lifetime.

I've worked as hard as I could as President to turn this country around. I am grateful for the chance I've had to serve. But I really think as a country we should view this as the beginning, not the end, that we've sort of turned this thing around. And now, we have a chance to paint on a canvas our dreams for tomorrow. That's what this whole deal is about.

So if somebody asks you tomorrow why you were here tonight, say, “There's a difference between the parties. I think the last 7 years were right, and the stakes could hardly be higher.” And those of you that are about my age, you just think about it. We've waited for 35 years, and we need to seize the chance.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:42 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Michael Sherman, president, M.J. Sherman Group; dinner guest George Beirne; dinner hosts John and Margo Catsimatidis and their son, Yianni;

Brian Snyder, investor, Biocraft Laboratories; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, Democratic National Committee; Charlton Heston, president, National Rifle Association; Gov. George W. Bush

of Texas; Richard A. Viguerie, chairman, president, and chief executive officer, ConservativeHQ.com; and Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York City.

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Thank you, Mark. Thank you, Jeff. And thank you for coming, all of you.

And I wanted to say a special word of appreciation to all of our musicians here. Thank you for playing tonight. You did such a wonderful job. And I want to thank Luther Vandross. We've never had a conversation about "Evergreen," but I think it's the best love song of the last 25 years. *[Laughter]* And so I was very happy when he sang it tonight.

I want to thank all of you for coming here. And I will be quite brief, because I want to spend time visiting with you and letting you say whatever you want to say to me or ask questions or whatever.

But you know, I'm not running for anything this year. *[Laughter]* And most days, I'm okay about it. I am campaigning to become a member of the Senate spouses club, however. *[Laughter]* And I'm feeling better about that.

But I want to say just a couple things to you, to amplify what my good friend Ed Rendell said. When I came to Washington in January of 1993, our country was, I thought, in quite a bit of trouble. We had high unemployment. We had high interest rates. We had quadrupled the debt of the country in 4 years. We had no real, serious technology policy, no real, serious environmental policy, no real, serious long-term economic policy. We certainly had no health care policy.

And our elections were basically—I thought it almost turned into caricature affairs, where basically for several years, even decades, the Republicans had succeeded in convincing enough Americans that the Democrats were weak on defense, weak on the economy, weak on the budget, weak on welfare, weak on crime, weak on this, that, and the other thing. We couldn't be trusted with the White House. And the wheels had to practically come off before any

of us could win. And I happened to be standing there when the wheels ran off.

It wasn't quite that simple. But I guess what I would like to say to you is that all of you here in your different ways have been immensely successful, or you wouldn't be here tonight. All of you also are capable of looking beyond your immediate self-interest, or you wouldn't be here tonight, because the other guys would give you a bigger tax cut quicker. And yet you're here.

So the first thing I want to say to you is that all these elections are for people to hold jobs. They're not to posture. They're to hold jobs. It matters what your vision of the country is. It matters what your vision of the job is. It matters what you know and how you go about your business and whether you care. In other words, it's a job, the Presidency.

You know, I want Al Gore to be elected because I know him better than anybody in this room and most people in the world. And I think he's a good man, and I know he's a courageous person. And I'm devoted to him, and he's been loyal to me. Yes, that's all true. But I also want him to be elected because I think he understands the future and has not only the ideas but the experience and the work habits to get us there. This is a job. It's not a place just of rhetorical or political posturing.

And the same thing is true of the Congress. And I go about doing as much work as I can to try to help all these folks raise enough money to be competitive. They're all going to be outspent. You know, our candidate for President is going to be outspent. Hillary's going to be outspent. They're all, no matter how much money we raise, they're all going to be outspent.

But in 1998, we were outspent by \$100 million, and we gained seats in the House of Representatives in the sixth year of a President's